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Care, policy, knowledge: translating between worlds

abstract

It is the achievement of this collection to challenge our everyday distinction between care and policy. In these ethnographic accounts, we learn how something we might call 'care-policy' is achieved in practice, 'on the ground'. In this brief postscript, I want to draw attention to the corollary world of the office, the way care-policy is constructed in the committee room and the debating chamber, in the offices and corridors of its administration. I note how the work of the office is likewise constituted in practice, in interaction between people and between people and things.

I then suggest that care-policy in the field and in the office is predicated on different ways of knowing; I note a specific tension between case and category. The studies presented here are made at the point of intersection of discrepant worlds/knowledges: some seem to expose and emphasise those discrepancies, but others point to ways in which, in practice, they might be resolved. In carrying out inspections, in assembling and articulating generic experiences of injustice, some actors seem to do care and policy together, piecing together knowledges of different kinds, translating between worlds.

keywords: care, policy, worlds, knowledge, translation

introduction

We care for ourselves and for each other, for our parents and children, our communities, the environment. It is difficult to imagine human being without human caring. In the world in which we live, caring appears threatened, seems to be something we must nurture and protect. The social space in which it happens - whether of family or community, tradition or culture - seems ever diminished, challenged by what appears to be an equal and opposite impulse to 'policy', that is to governance, regulation and accounting. This much is addressed by a strain of classical sociology, carried by the work of Husserl and Elias, Habermas and Bourdieu: care belongs to the realm of culture, lifeworld and habitus, and is challenged or colonised by an encroaching system, of rationality, commodity and instrumentality. So we must take care, it seems, of care itself.

But we might also be critical of care: care is a burden, a set of obligations distributed unevenly among men and women and according to the prejudices of race and class, a source of exploitation and a means of control. To care for is also to exert power over, for good or ill.

And this is at least in part why care needs policy. If care is a good thing, if we want to be sure of it when and where it's needed and not just as it might happen to be available, if we want to mitigate the risk of abuse with which it is associated, then it will require some policy framework or complement, whether formal or informal. Similarly, if policy is to serve any good and useful purpose, if it is to be realised effectively, it will be made and implemented carefully and caringly, painstakingly, with attention to detail and sensitive to relationships and circumstances.

It is the achievement of this collection to challenge our everyday distinction between care and policy. The challenge is made in the course of engaged and nuanced ethnographic accounts, introducing us to worlds and practices thickly described and then cleverly and creatively theorised. These are studies of the moment in which the abstract plans and designs of the policy maker work directly on their specific and often recalcitrant objects: that which the policy sciences conventionally construe as policy implementation as distinct from its formulation. Here, in these case studies, care and policy are enacted together, in sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory but invariably uncertain ways. They are but different aspects of a single assemblage, something the actor-network theorist might call 'care-policy'.

Now I want to draw a different distinction, inevitably less well explored in this collection, but one to which I think it usefully leads. It is that between care-policy on the ground, 'in the wild' as STS might have it, and care-policy in the committee room and the debating chamber, in the offices and corridors of its administration. For a reciprocal kind of relationship between care and policy lurks somewhere above and behind the food inspector (Lavau and Bingham), the waste manager (Gill), the care worker (Schillmeier), the community organiser (Tironi and Rodriguez-Giralt), the medical or clinical practitioner (Greco; Singleton and Mee), the activist-researcher (Gabrys) and the conservation biologist (Joks and Law). Each comes already equipped - burdened - with the form and the questionnaire, the bureaucratic regulation and the scientific survey. But neither she nor he, nor indeed we, can take the form and the questionnaire for granted as finished and stable; both remain ontologically and epistemologically unfinished and incomplete.

What has already happened? How have the terms and conditions of care-policy on the ground been set? In what follows, I want to draw attention to what goes on the world of policy making, the world in which guidelines and frameworks are both required and produced. This is to make a provisional distinction between the world (and work) of the office, and the world and work of the field. For if we are to understand the relationship between care and policy - let alone if we are to improve it - we will need to devote as much of our ethnographic and critical attention to the one as to the other. In our everyday understandings, policy and care are neither essentially nor necessarily separate but have been made so; our sociological task, which is perhaps also our political task - is to investigate ways in which they might be made and unmade together.

1. care and policy in practice

Much that is said here about care and policy 'on the ground' is consistent with the practice turn in social science more generally. Care is realised in practice: it exists only in the doing of it. In the tradition of microsociology, it is a form of action, and specifically of interaction: it is a collective accomplishment or achievement carried on in relation with others, both those we care with and those we care for, whether in nursing homes in Germany (Schillmeier), in meetings of former smelting workers in Chile (Tironi and Rodriguez-Giralt), on a street in England (Gill) or in Pennsylvania countryside (Gabrys).

Care entails emotional commitment, and is also physical and material, effected by human bodies in collaboration with tools, instruments and machines. It has a communicative or symbolic function, significant and meaningful only to the extent that it is intelligible to others. It

is, by the same token, an articulation of values, normative, a pursuit of certain kinds of good and a corollary, inevitable neglect of others. It is future-oriented: it has the sense of nurture, of growing and cultivating that which might be brought into being. It has a tragic aspect, too: caring is sometimes a Sisyphean project to keep sound and whole that which is irreparably subject to disintegration and decay. Care happens in the interstices, in 'moments of hesitation, questionability and indecision' (Schillmeier): as a practice, it is an irreducible unit of social life, existing and persisting when other kinds of usually more formal and explicit institutional and organizational arrangement break down.

Though we learn much less about it here, making and implementing policy - formulating, negotiating and enacting collective decisions about collective goods - is also a form of practice, a process not an object, a set of relations not a set of things. For policy is made in myriad interactions of human beings, including politicians, civil servants, lawyers, scientific experts, lobbyists, activists and others. It is situated in the way that caring is, though its sites are elsewhere, in offices and meeting rooms, on desks and screens. It is a communicative practice, carried out largely through discussion and debate among specialists. It invariably takes material form, principally on paper, in proposals, statements, reports, budgets and bills. Policy making is a process of bringing things into relation with one another, or forming new relations between things, including interests, values, precedents, resources and opportunities. It is a way of repairing relations at moments of breakdown: disruptions and disjunctures occasion policy in the same way they call for care. Policy is uncertain and contingent, and about promoting, halting and reversing change. Policy is itself a kind of caring, and those who make policy care deeply about what they do.

All of this is only to argue that policy is a practice in the same way that care is; that it is a collective accomplishment which endures only in its continuing reiteration. To say that it is a practice is to say equally forcefully that it is not an object or thing; properly, we should speak not of care but of caring or providing care, not of policy but of doing or making policy.

In turn, this is to make care-policy in the office and in the field theoretically commensurable, only – as we have seen in these papers - to stumble over their frequent incompatibility in practice. What is at issue here, what is made vivid in these papers, is the radical difference between these worlds: the practices of care-policy in the office and in the field seem to fit with each other only imperfectly, if at all.

Why should this be so? I think it's because they comprise different ways of knowing. As practices, they are not only relational, communicative, material and normative but also knowledgeable: they both rest on and reproduce distinctive epistemologies.

2. knowledge practices

'Care-policy' as reconfigured in these papers, and whether in the field or in the office, is nothing so much as a way of knowing. In different worlds, it entails different 'practices of attention' - as Stephanie Lavau and Nick Bingham describe the work of care, though their phrase surely applies to policy, too. In each world, it is constituted in categories and constructs which entail different ways of knowing and thinking, and which reproduce those worlds. In this way, they 'bring

worlds with them' (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012; Gill), and by the same token they render others invisible and inaccessible.

The point is made starkly in Monica Greco's treatment of the problem of medically unexplained symptoms. The effective management of such conditions foregrounds the importance of *process* not merely in procedural terms, as what occurs between pre-constituted subjects or entities, but in the conception of the nature of the disease phenomenon as explicitly unfinished, in the process of becoming, as well as being itself and vital and responsive. Approaching medically unexplained symptoms in this way differs profoundly from the epistemological structure of biomedicine, where diagnostic acts are separated from therapeutic acts. Caring for something as new and as different as this turns on knowing it differently.

This difference is sometimes cast as that between narrative and number. Solveig Joks and John Law contrast Sami 'ways of knowing' about salmon with those of conservation biology. Crucially, these different systems are strongly bounded: different ways of knowing cannot know anything beyond themselves; they cannot know of or acknowledge each other. 'The stories that make up [local ecological knowledge] do not count (literally count) as evidence in the world of quantitative population modelling used in conservation biology' (Joks and Law). In the same way, it is perhaps no coincidence that the sociology presented here, which repeatedly asserts the significance of care, is built on ethnographic case studies, or stories (Singleton and Mee): stories of carrying out food hygiene inspections, of living with stroke or with Alzheimer's, of surveying a street.

The difference is also expressed in the case/category problem: care-policy in the field is contingent and specific, while in the office it is abstract and generic. In the field it is specific and unique to the local configuration of disposition and circumstance, such that 'conflict between caring for emerging situations and caring for comparable settings is inevitable' (Schillmeier). Care-policy in the field is addressed to the case with which it is immediately confronted; in the office, it is to the category or set in which the case must be placed.

Another way of exploring these differences in epistemological terms is to think of the one, care-policy in the field, as resting principally on embodiment in a knowing subject, and the other, in the office, on inscription in artefacts, and especially in documents. In the field, care-policy is produced in embodied action and interaction, in the immediate experience of seeing and feeling and doing. This is how we know how to care and what to care about: how we learn of the need for it, how we learn what is needed and how to provide it. It is produced in the office, by contrast, in the interaction of mediated accounts and representations of the world, in debating and discussing statements, proposals, budgets and other forms of documentary evidence. 'Scientific knowledge, statistically informed... (is) decanted into administrative regulations' as Joks and Law put it, while local ecological knowledge is 'not intrinsically textual in form'.

Care-policy is then re-inscribed in the administrative template or form, which serves as its material technology of attention: the form translates and condenses official requirements into specific observations, shaping where and how, for example, the food inspector Jack should direct his attention (Lavau and Bingham). It is the form that 'make(s) equivalence possible' (Gill).

This explains much of the seeming horror of care-policy as produced in the office, its appearance as other and alien. The immediacy and idiosyncrasy of the field must be faded out, its

interactional quality reduced in order to be represented in generic terms and made comparable with others - and it's that reduction that we cannot bear. The office tends to make care or compassion knowable as a measurable good held by individuals (Singleton and Mee), and that seems to deprive it (and us) of its essentially human, social character.

Practices clash, then, because epistemologies do. And yet, while there is much in these papers to show that 'embodied' care and 'inscribed' policy are incompatible, there is just as much to suggest that they might be and sometimes are indeed brought into relation in practice. For whether embodied or inscribed, knowledge must be enacted, realised through being articulated in action (Freeman and Sturdy 2014). What is interesting is how many of those actions create hybrids, appear to translate between worlds (Freeman 2009).

The practitioner is an epistemological bricoleur (Freeman 2007). In performing a food safety check in a small poultry butchery, Stephanie Lavau and Nick Bingham show, Maria 'patch(es) together a composite picture from the variety of knowledges she has generated', including her recall of previous visits and what she sees now, the weight and feel of a carcass, the paperwork which documents the origin of the meat and the identity and qualifications of staff who process it, the evidence presented by the physical environment of a building, its fittings and work surfaces - and makes sense of all of this in relation to what she knows of regulations and standards. In practice, in caring and in doing policy - in implementing policy carefully - different ways of knowing are knitted together.

In a different way, information is inscribed in the bodies of former workers at a copper smelting plant, in the form of the scars and diseases they carry (Tironi and Rodriguez-Giralt). Policy, or at least a claim to a new and different policy, is articulated in their leader's (Luis's) embodied performance in a meeting, which serves to galvanise their collective interest. Caring of this kind makes for knowing, through the assimilation and accumulation of information; shared knowing makes for the possibility of collective - that is, political - action. For these workers, care is 'a way of making their circumstances and suffering understandable, knowable and actionable' (Tironi and Rodriguez-Giralt). Is that caring, or doing policy, or perhaps both?

Chuck and Janis care about their Pennsylvania environment, and are concerned at the effects of fracking on it, and so begin to monitor changing levels of air pollution near their home (Gabrys). They work speculatively rather than experimentally or scientifically, and, with others, contribute to the aggregation of what would otherwise remain discrete, distributed feeling and experience. 'Care emerges here through indicating the harm experienced by individuals, which can further begin to inform additional ways of addressing the harm experienced by communities' (Gabrys). Chuck and Janis care, not by countering or resisting science and policy, but by doing them differently, in combination.

3. care, policy and knowledge in practice

The questions posed in and by these papers have to do with the nature of care and caring, the relationship between care and policy and the way it is tested, formed and reformed in practice. This is an important political question: 'Who cares for what, when, how?', as Harold Lasswell

might have put it.¹ It is, clearly, a profoundly sociological question, too: what are we doing when we are caring? And answering any of these questions properly entails asking yet another, which has to do with the nature of policy and policy making. If we are interested in the relationship between care and policy, we will want to understand not only (i) how care is constructed, but also (ii) how policy is constructed, and then (iii) how the difference between them is constructed.

The achievement of this collection is to challenge the sense that care intrinsically different to policy, or that policy is somehow intrinsically different to care. We might think of policy itself as a form of care, and in that light ask questions of the way it is constructed and carried out. I have tried to suggest that the difference between 'policy' and 'care' is constituted through the practices by which they are performed. We create differences between care and policy in practice, just as we create the difference between who cares and who or what is cared for by doing that caring, in practice. Does this also suggest ways in which those differences might be overcome? Might we remake the relation between care and policy?

Doing so will entail undoing any 'settled notion of policy' (Gill). It will mean treating policy making as a practice or set of practices, something which goes on between human beings, which can be done well or badly, for good or ill. It will mean accessing and appraising, recognising and rethinking the practice of the policy maker sociologically, making the world of the office present in the way the work of the field appears in these papers. It will mean finding out how care and policy are enacted in relation to each other in the office, too, how their different registers connect (Clark and Bettini), what happens 'when contexts meet' (Singleton, 2012; Gill).

If the uncertainties of the relationship between care and policy in the field and in the office can be attributed at least in part to their respective ways of knowing, then it is in paying specific attention to their knowledge practices that we might begin to reform the relationship between them. Just as the office feels for a grip on care in the work of the food inspector and the environmental surveyor, so the field reaches for policy in the local activity of those affected by copper smelting and the fracking industry. But they don't quite connect, at least not as well as they might, and at least not in the studies gathered here. What would it take for policy and care to find some further connection, some way of talking to each other, some practical commensurability?

Natalie Gill describes the operations of the office in her surveyor's coding and highlighting, his skillful manipulation of categories and indices, his trained ability to convert the mundane appearance of the street into the terms set out on the form. His work seems to deny the social properties of the street, the meaning it has to those who use it, those who live in the community of which it is a part. But it might be otherwise: what if his project and the need for it were genuinely negotiated with that community, what if it were designed and carried out in collaboration with them?

To bring the office into an immediate and meaningful relationship with the field will entail fostering direct encounters between the two. It will entail new forms of participation and engagement, new ways of doing politics as well as care and policy. We need to find ways to allow care-policy in the office and the field to work together and in relation to each other

¹ The play is on his classic *Politics: Who gets what, when, how*, McGraw-Hill, 1936.

without trying to reduce them to the same thing. We need to know what it might really mean to 'explore ways of allowing the two sets of practices to go on more even-handedly in difference' (Joks and Law).

Lastly, we might ask what kind of sociology is needed to explore, understand and promote this varied work of temporary and precarious reconciliations. For sociology is a practice, too, after all, and quintessentially a 'practice of attention'. It is a 'human science', one that seeks to combine the contrary impulses I have tried to explore here. These papers show that sociology cares, in various critical and constructive ways. But they also show that it is also something like policy: it makes and takes representations of the world and brings them into relation with each other, in order to say something generic, abstract, even law-like. It works between the specificities and sensitivities of the case and the regimes of science and regulation. Its practitioners write 'speculatively', perhaps both despite and because they know their writings will be classed as 'output', accorded a number, made equivalent to others. And in writing about the policies and practices of caring they are themselves 'caring for what exists' in Foucault's phrase (Bell 2015). They are remaking - carefully - what counts as science, what counts as policy, and what count as the appropriate objects of their attention.

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